

MASOC PRACTICE UPDATE: Prevention and Progress



January 2022 MASOC NEWSLETTER
By Joan Tabachnick and David Prescott

Childhood Community Risk Factors on Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration (IPV) and Victimization Among College Students

BOTTOM LINE

Higher community cohesion during childhood lowered the risk of IPV perpetration in both male and female students in the campus setting.

RESEARCH

According to the research, young adults (18-24) are at the highest risk for both IPV perpetration and victimization. While individual risk factors have been extensively explored, there are few studies which focus on the impact of community factors, particularly childhood community factors impact on later IPV perpetration and victimization in the college and university setting. For the purposes of this short article, we will focus on the factors affecting perpetration of IPV within institutions of higher education (IHE)

Yeo and colleagues developed three models to explore the impact of childhood risk factors on IPV perpetration and victimization. The first model explored individual risk factors, the second integrated community factors and the third added in the interaction between childhood community cohesion and community poverty.

Their results suggest that the only individual risk factor for IPV perpetration in male students was IPV victimization. In contrast, perpetration by female students was significantly aligned with drug use, depression, and IPV victimization. The authors suggest that individual factors may be more relevant for preventing IPV in female students than in male students.

However, when looking at community level factors, childhood community cohesion was a significant protective factor for IPV perpetration for both male and female students. In other words, higher levels of community cohesion were associated with decreased IPV perpetration. It also appears that although childhood community poverty was shown to be a risk factor in previous studies, the protective impact of community cohesion seemed to act as a critical protective factor for college student's IPV perpetration. In this study, community violence was not associated with increased levels of perpetration.

Community cohesion was defined as “a sense of belonging that comes from living alongside others with similar values that can be relied on for support, consisting of a sense of safety, connectedness, and acceptance from the community.” The authors speak to the need for early interventions and policies to strengthen community cohesion to prevent the perpetration of IPV. These include changing the physical environment, creating opportunities for social interaction and community ties.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

Those working to prevent the perpetration of violence quickly learn about risk factors of offending and re-offense. The findings from this study are interesting for a number of reasons. First, the research points out that factors such as community cohesiveness may not be risk factors in their absence so much as protective in their presence. Second is the importance of understanding the context of family and community surrounding the individual and not simply the individual risk factors for the client one is working with. The research points out that understanding the risk of perpetrating violence or even the risk factors for being victimized is not as simple as using traditional individual risk measures. These findings further illustrate the fact that context matters: understanding the interactive effects of community influence and individual risk and protective factors is key. Further, this study also illuminates the importance of pursuing an approach that fully accounts for gender. Risk for violence among women is not as simple as reminders that the base rates of re-offense are lower for women than for men. Our assessments and interventions need to be intersectionally informed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Our field has focused much of its energy during recent decades on individual risk factors for perpetration that exist within each person who causes harm to others. The first examinations of protective factors among adolescents took place less than thirty years ago and even less research has been focused on protective factors among adults. These findings focusing on the impact of community cohesion and how that might be different based upon gender point to another emerging avenue of study, one that many of us have observed directly, but that has received less empirical study.

These findings give credence to the idea that it behooves everyone to view violence, including sexual abuse, through the lens of a public health perspective. Even though people are responsible for their own behaviors, it is vital to remember that many internal and external factors beyond one’s control (such as gender and the absence of community cohesion) can contribute to – and interact with each other to propel – acts of violence. It is interesting to note that the experience of community cohesion played a protective role while community violence did not increase risk for IPV. There might be many reasons for this, such as the nature of the sample (university students) or the statistical procedures applied, but one key area for further research and practice consideration is how we can better build community cohesion to prevent violence from occurring. Further, these findings invite us to further consider ways that we can help those who are truly at high risk for repeated acts of violence. With more people studying the many contexts in which violence occurs, we are better poised to establish both research and policy agendas for preventing intimate partner violence in the future.

CITATION:

Yeo, H., Choi, Y. J., Son, E., Cho, H., Yun, S. H., & Lee, J. O. (2021). Childhood community risk factors on intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization among college students. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 08862605211050097.

ABSTRACT

The study examined the effect of community environments, such as community cohesion, community safety, and community poverty, in childhood on the likelihood of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) perpetration and victimization in young adulthood. The study used the cross-sectional survey data of 2,082 college students collected in 2016–2017 from six universities in the U.S. and the data for the childhood community environment from the 2007–2011 American Community Survey. Hierarchical regressions were performed separately by gender to 1) assess the effects of community factors in addition to individual factors for IPV perpetration and victimization, and to 2) identify the interaction effect of community cohesion with community poverty on IPV perpetration and victimization. Community factors of community cohesion and community poverty were significantly correlated to different types of IPV. For IPV perpetration, only community cohesion was significant for, the interaction effect between community cohesion and poverty showed that higher community cohesion lowered the risk of community poverty on later IPV perpetration in both genders. For IPV victimization, only female students were affected by community poverty, whereas none of the community factors had an impact on male students. The findings imply the significance of early interventions and policies strengthening the community environment, especially community cohesion, for preventing IPV. The findings also suggest that assessing risk and protective factors on IPV in multiple contexts during childhood is important to develop effective programs preventing IPV.